

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

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A speck of dust—or a grain of sand—may trip up your ordinary murderer. In short, "murder will out" is quite axiomatic and has caused some topnotch thugs to go so far as to say, "Murder—is out!"

FIFTY yards ahead, the traffic light switched to caution yellow. Fred Martin eased his car to a stop just as the red appeared.

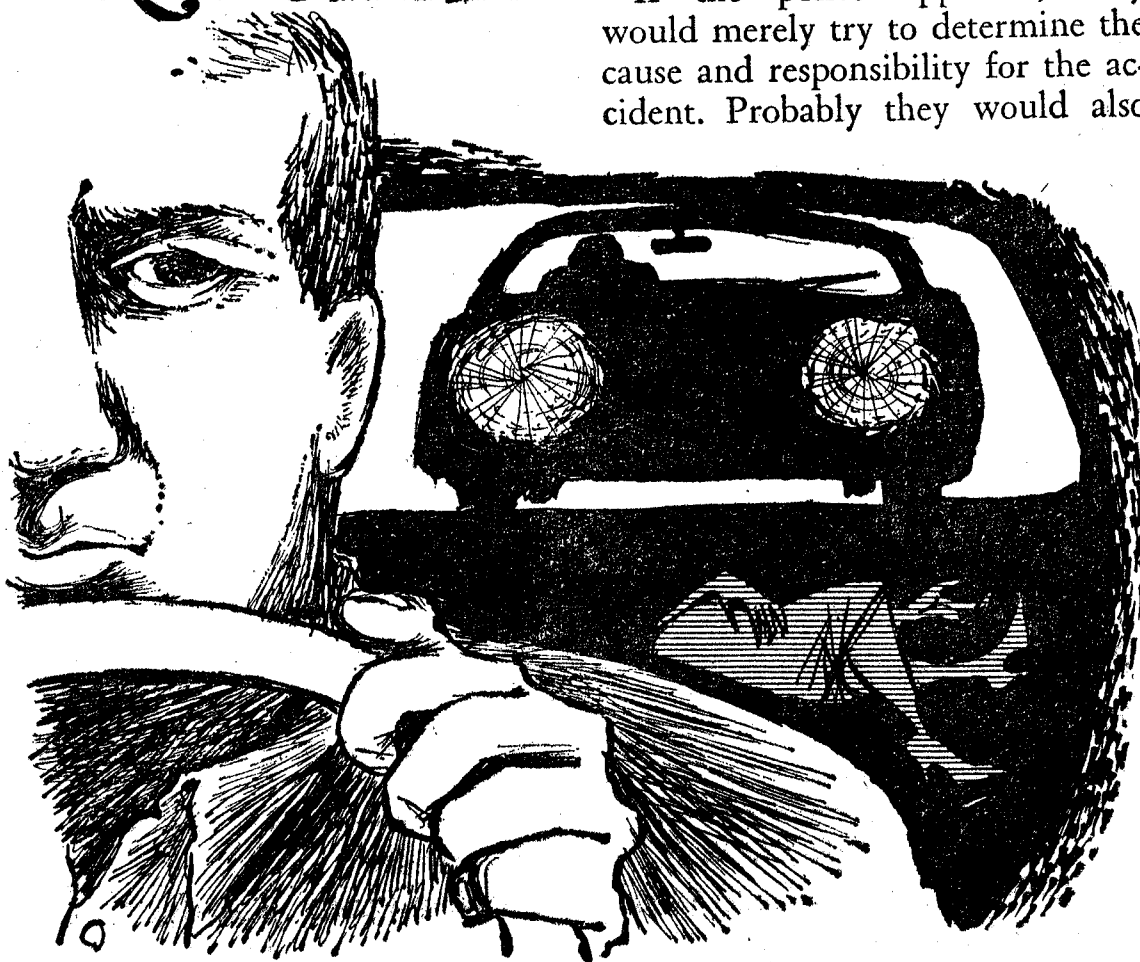
He had to be careful now. This

BY JACK RITCHIE

was no time for an accident. Not even an insignificant one.

It wasn't that Martin had any fears that Beatrice's body in the trunk of the car might be discovered. He knew that even in the event of a small accident, there would be no reason for anyone to pry back there.

If the police appeared, they would merely try to determine the cause and responsibility for the accident. Probably they would also



check the drivers to find out if either or both of them had been drinking.

And Martin was stone cold sober. At least now he was.

He waited patiently for the green light and then moved forward.

No. An accident in itself was nothing to worry about. But his license number would be taken and Martin couldn't have that done. Not at this particular hour of the night.

He kept his car well within the twenty-five mile speed limit on Capitol. As he approached Seventh, he edged carefully into the left lane, flicked on his turn signal, and swung onto Highway 32.

Her disappearance would, naturally, cause some suspicion on the part of the police. After all, it was their job to be suspicious. But in the end they would be forced to come to the conclusion that she had simply packed up and left him.

Martin could imagine his conversation with the police. It would occur at around ten in the morning. Just about an hour after Martin got out of jail.

He would undoubtedly be suffering from a hangover and he would be drinking black coffee. "When I came home this morning," he would say, "I noticed that Beatrice's bed hadn't been slept in."

BETWEEN 4 AND 12

The traffic was light at seven-thirty that evening and the three-quarter moon made a cool path of the highway. Whenever he met an on-coming car, Martin dimmed his lights.

He would get to the patch of woods in fifteen minutes. It was off on a side road and everything was ready. He had dug the shallow grave Sunday evening, and it was waiting for Beatrice.

The sergeant would think that over. "Couldn't she have already made the bed and gone out shopping, or something like that?"

Martin would hesitate. "Well, Beatrice usually sleeps rather late. Until noon or one o'clock."

The sergeant would form an opinion on Beatrice. He might, too, be irked because Martin had bothered the police so soon. "You called us right away?"

"About five minutes after I saw she wasn't home. I thought that perhaps Beatrice might have spent the night at her sister's home. She sometimes does that. But her sister said she hadn't seen Beatrice in two days."

"Did you phone anyone else?"

"No. Beatrice has very few friends. Actually none that I know of. I thought of calling the hospitals, but there are so many in the phone book, I thought it might be better if I phoned the police. They would be likely to know if there had been an accident."

The sergeant would look at his notes again. "You came home at approximately nine-thirty this morning? You work nights?"

"No. I work from four in the afternoon until midnight," Martin would appear reluctant to go on, but then he would blurt out the truth. "I was in jail until just an hour ago."

The sergeant might raise an eyebrow.

Martin would explain. "After I left the factory, just past midnight, I stopped in at a tavern in the neighborhood."

The sergeant would prod. "Yes?"

"I'm afraid I had a little too much to drink. I drove into a parked car a few doors away when I left." Martin would allow himself to become mildly indignant. "I've never had an accident

before in my life. I've never even had a parking ticket. But when the police came, they took me to jail. I was released on bail at nine this morning."

Very likely the sergeant's voice would be dry. "In this city we jail drunken drivers for the night. It keeps them off the streets until they sober up."

That was something Martin knew—and had planned on. But he would appear to be properly abashed.

The sergeant would ask permission to examine the bedroom. He would notice the twin beds and he would look into the half-empty closet.

Martin's mouth would drop slightly. "Almost all of her clothes are gone!"

And they would also discover that two suitcases, the good ones, were missing too.

The sergeant would ask, "What was your wife wearing the last time you saw her?"

Martin would think back. "I'm afraid I can't help you much on that. She was still in her dressing robe when I left at quarter after three yesterday afternoon."

"Did you and your wife have any...domestic difficulties?"

Martin would be happy to tell the truth about that. It would supply the motive for her disappearance. However, he would appear to speak reluctantly. "A few. But I think we got along as well as

anyone else until..." He would stop as though struck by a doubtful thought.

"Until?"

"Well, about six months ago there was a superintendency open in the shop. I thought, and so did Beatrice, that in view of my seniority and work record... I'm afraid that we both counted on it too much. It would have meant quite a raise in pay for me."

"She was bitter about it?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Did she blame you? Or the shop?"

Martin would say nothing, but the sergeant could easily draw his conclusion.

Martin remembered his own dark disappointment when he had been passed over. The personnel manager must have felt some guilt about it, because he took the trouble to take Martin aside and explain why it had happened.

The superintendency required a man with more aggression, a man who could give orders, make decisions. Martin's work record was excellent, but still...

The personnel manager had laughed self-consciously. "You're sort of colorless, Martin. You fade into the wallpaper. Nobody knows you're around at all."

He hoped that Martin understood and had no hard feelings.

Now Martin reduced his speed and turned onto the gravel side road. He drove half a mile more

and parked in the shadows of birch and pines.

He had some difficulty removing Beatrice's body from the trunk and carrying it the hundred feet to the open grave.

He went back to the car for the shovel and the two suitcases.

Beatrice had died an easy death.

It was something she didn't deserve, Martin reflected, but he hadn't wanted any kind of a mess.

He had accumulated the sleeping pills, one by one, from the bottle Beatrice kept in the medicine cabinet. It had taken some time, but he had wanted to be positive that he had enough to do the job thoroughly.

This morning he had dissolved all of them in the fifth of brandy Beatrice stored in the refrigerator.

It had been a quarter to three in the afternoon when she had filled her glass and added a touch of soda. It was always around that time when she started drinking.

He had been in the kitchen making sandwiches and packing them into his lunch pail and he had been almost unable to suppress his feeling of elation as she took the first sip.

When he had left for the shop a half an hour later, she had been refilling her glass.

Martin replaced the bushes and patted the earth carefully around them. In the moonlight he surveyed the job he had done and could find no fault with it.

Beatrice and the two suitcases were gone forever.

He cleaned the shovel thoroughly and walked back to the car. He turned on the ignition and started the motor.

They had been married ten years and each year had been an eternity of bullying and badgering. But Martin had always felt a sense of duty toward the marriage and an unwillingness to admit to himself that things would never improve.

He had never even mentioned divorce until after that superintendency thing. When that had fallen through, Beatrice had become more vicious than ever.

As far as Martin was concerned, it had marked the end of their marriage. But the mention of divorce had brought an unalterable stubbornness into her eyes. Perhaps she realized that she could never find another man who would tolerate her tongue, her laziness, her drinking.

At the arterial sign, Martin came to a full stop, and then turned back on Highway 32.

The sergeant would no doubt be thorough. After he discovered that Beatrice was not in a hospital, he would have to ask delicate questions.

"Mr. Martin, was your wife insured?"

Martin would shake his head. "No. She didn't believe in insurance on herself. But I have two

policies on my life worth fifteen thousand."

The sergeant would put 'No insurance' on his pad. "You say you were working from four until midnight?"

"Yes." Martin would choose his words. "But I usually leave home at about quarter after three. The drive to the plant is only a half an hour, but I don't like to take the chance of being late and getting locked out of the parking lot."

The sergeant would want to know more about that. "Locked out of the parking lot?"

"Yes. The company parking lot. It's an area of about two square blocks and enclosed by an eight foot fence. You see, several years ago some cars were stolen from the lot while the men were working. So the company enclosed the entire area. The gates are locked ten or fifteen minutes after the shift goes on."

"And if you get to the plant later than that?"

"You're out of luck. You have to find off-the-street parking in the neighborhood."

It might not happen then, but eventually the sergeant would probe the subject further. "How many gates are there?"

"Two. One on the north end of the lot and one on the south. Each has an exit and an entrance lane."

"Your car was inside the lot from approximately four to midnight?"

"Of course. I was working."

The sergeant would be casual. "Would any of the attendants remember that you parked your car inside the lot, rather than on the street?"

Martin would think about it. "I always come in the south gate. That's Joe Byrnes. Yes, I think he would remember. He knows me fairly well."

And Joe Byrnes should remember. When you stop at the entrance to repay a five dollar loan, the man should remember.

"Suppose, for some reason, you had to leave before your shift ended. For example, if you became ill and had to go home. How would you get out?"

"You'd just go to one of the gates and see the attendant. You'd identify yourself and he would take your name and license number. Then he'd let you out." Martin would laugh slightly. "I guess that's to prevent somebody from climbing over the fence and stealing a car. They want to make sure you really own it."

"Is there always an attendant at the gates?"

Martin would nod. "Yes."

But that wasn't really true. Joe Byrnes was supposed to be there, but Martin knew that after the gates were locked, Joe always wandered over to Ed Parker's north gate to kill most of the evening.

Joe figured that anybody who

wanted to get out before the shift was over would use the north gate anyway. It was more convenient and closer to the plant.

But Joe would never admit to the sergeant that he hadn't been at his gate all the time. And Ed Parker would say nothing either, because they both knew that Joe could get fired if that came out.

When Martin had come to work that afternoon, he had parked his car close to the south gate. At seven he had slipped out of the factory, made sure that Joe and Ed were in the north shack, and then gone back to his car.

He had quietly unlocked the south gate, eased his car through, and then locked the gate behind him.

The sergeant might ask, "Does anybody besides the attendant have keys to the gates?"

"I don't really know."

"No duplicates?"

Martin would shrug. "I suppose so. They would be locked up somewhere, I imagine."

But Joe Byrnes was careless about such things. Martin had dropped in to see him often enough to know that. And when Martin had discovered how simple it was to steal a duplicate, he had formed his entire plan to get rid of Beatrice.

He had had the key for more than three months now and as far as he knew, Joe had never missed it. Nevertheless, Martin would

have to remember to return it. Just in case somebody checked.

Martin stopped for the light at Capitol and turned right. He noticed that the dark sedan behind him also made the turn.

The sergeant would ask more questions.

"You didn't take your car out of the lot for any reason last night, did you?"

"No. As I said. I was working."

"What is your license number?"

"C25-388."

"And your job at the plant?"

"I'm a stock chaser."

The sergeant wouldn't know what that was.

"I see to it that the assembly line doesn't run short of any parts. For instance, if a certain type of bolts are low at one point, I immediately go to the department of supply concerned with them and make sure that the bolts are rushed over."

"Then you travel around the plant during your shift? A lot of people could verify the fact that you were there from four to midnight?"

"Of course. Dozens."

There was a weakness in that, but it couldn't be helped. No one can be in two places at the same time, but Martin had done the best he could. He had made certain that a great many people had seen him before seven and he would make certain that many more would see him after nine.

He counted on the confusion and movement that existed in the factory to aid him and he felt certain that a number of persons would "remember" that they had seen him between seven and nine—if that should ever be necessary. Or, at the very least, they would not be sure whether they had or not.

"Are you the only stock chaser in the plant?"

"No. There are about ten others. We all work out of Mr. Hanson's office on the plant floor."

"Would you be missed if you were gone a couple of hours?"

Martin would laugh. "I certainly hope so."

But he wouldn't be. Martin was reasonably positive of that. With almost a dozen stock chasers going in and out of his office, Hanson would never notice that Martin was gone two hours. Actually he would have been away from his job only an hour and a half, since the lunch period was included in the time.

Martin glanced at the rear view mirror as he turned south on Twentieth.

The gray sedan was still behind him.

Martin frowned slightly.

"After you left work, how long were you in this tavern?" the sergeant would ask.

"About an hour."

"What's the name of the place?"

"Pete's Tap. It's half a block from the plant."

Pete would be able to back up that part of the story. Ever since Martin had conceived his plan to get rid of Beatrice, he had made it his practice to drop in at the tavern for a drink every night after he finished his shift. Pete knew him very well by now.

The sergeant would have to find out one more thing. "As far as you know, who was the last person to see your wife?"

"The dry cleaning delivery man. He brought some clothes back and picked up some to be cleaned. It was around three o'clock."

The delivery man always came Mondays at three. But Martin had been nervous about it until he appeared.

And that would be about it.

From there on, the sergeant could figure things out for himself.

The delivery man saw her at three. Martin left at quarter after three in order to get to the parking lot by four. His car was locked in the lot until midnight. Then he spent an hour at Pete's Tap. At one, or a few minutes later, he had an accident and was taken to jail. He was released at nine, came directly home, and phoned the police five or ten minutes later.

No. If he had killed his wife, there hadn't been any time to get rid of her body. Unless it was still

in the house. And it might be. Martin smiled.

Perhaps they would even search.

At Greenfield, Martin signaled and made a right turn. The gray sedan followed, approximately fifty feet behind him.

Martin experienced a sense of alarm. Was it a squad car? But why should it be following him?

His eyes lowered to the speedometer. He was under the speed limit. Safely under.

When he stopped at a light, he peered at the rear view mirror.

No. It wasn't a squad car. That much he could make out.

But it could be a plainclothes man, Martin thought, panic growing. Is there something wrong with my car? Did I go through any stop lights?

He shook his head almost angrily. That couldn't be it. He would have stopped me when it happened.

He stole a look over his shoulder. No. He couldn't be a detective. He was a little man. Even from here Martin could see that. The police didn't take men that small.

When the light changed, Martin's car moved forward. He turned at the next corner.

The sedan followed.

Martin began to sweat. This might be some kind of a hold-up. He might be waiting for Martin to stop at a dark street intersection. Perhaps he thought Martin

was going home and he planned to rob him as he put his car in the garage.

Martin went around the block to get back to the well-lighted Greenfield Avenue.

His eyes went furtively to the rear view mirror and he exhaled in relief.

The sedan was no longer following him.

It must have been one of those coincidences. The car hadn't been following him at all.

At the factory lot, Martin softly opened the south gate in its lonely semi-darkness. He parked his car and walked past the north shack on the way back to the factory.

Joe Byrnes and Ed Parker were playing gin rummy.

No one seemed to notice him when Martin re-entered the factory. And Hanson was busy at the phone, as usual.

He handed Martin an assignment. "Take care of this right away."

Martin hadn't been missed at all.

"Sure," Martin said to Hanson.

The little man parked his dark sedan and entered the six story building. He took an elevator to the fourth floor and made his way to an unused typewriter in the City Room. He copied a column of numbers from his notebook and took them to one of the editors.

The editor looked up. "I wish I had your job."

"You just think so. Following cars half the night's no picnic."

The editor glanced at the list. "Which is the luckiest one. Who gets the fifty dollar award?"

The little man pointed. "That one. I picked him up a little while ago and followed him for three miles. He didn't even bend a rule in the traffic book."

The editor pursed his lips. "Considering this is Safe Driver Week, we'll run all the license numbers on the front page. Find out who owns C25-388. Get a capsule interview and a picture. We'll use them too."



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